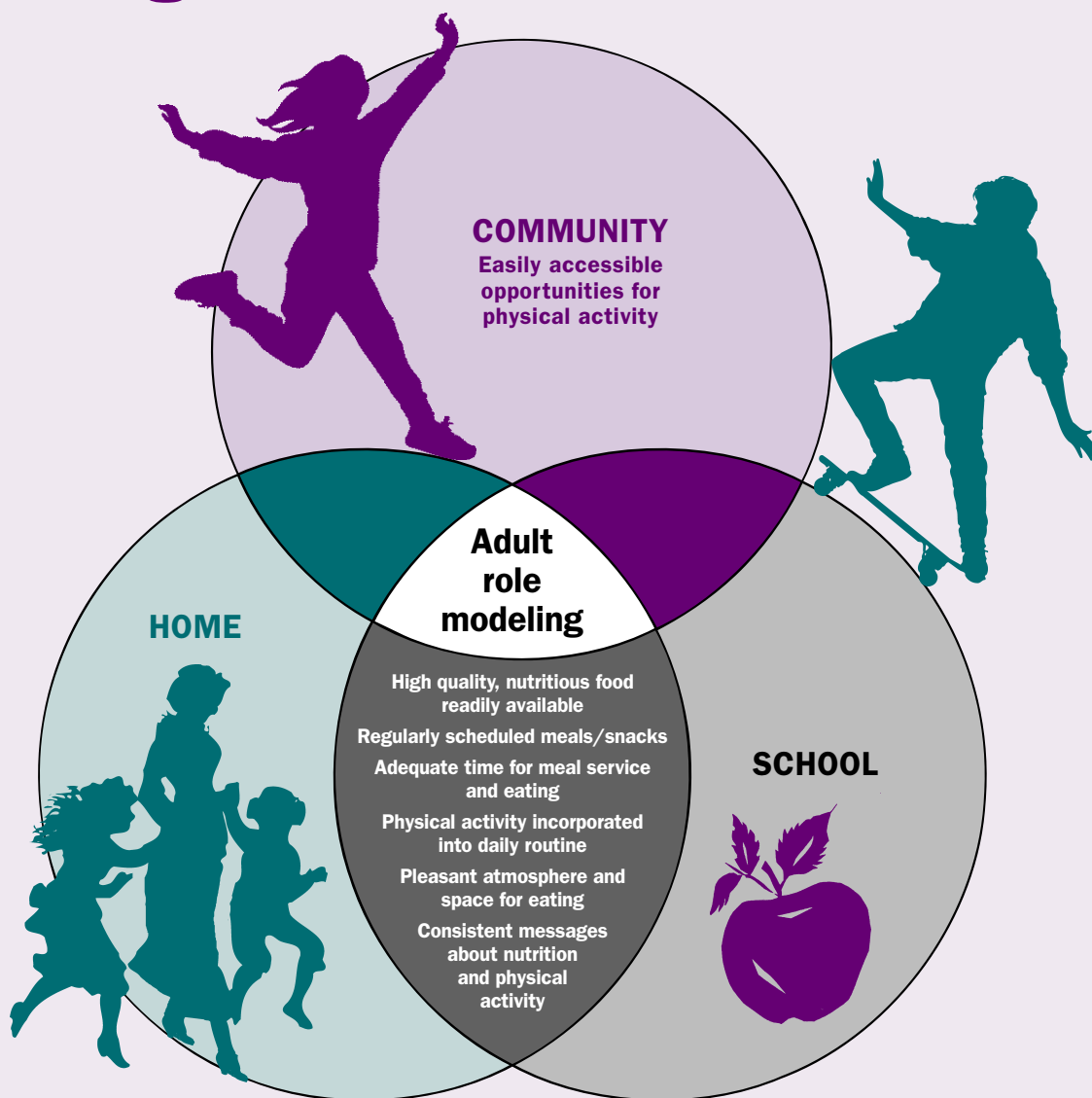


# Child Nutrition

SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE EDITION

April, 2002 / Vol. 2, No. 2

## Rating the Nutrition Environment



The physical activity and eating habits of students are influenced by their entire environment, not just what goes on in the cafeteria and the gym. Successful improvement of the nutrition environment results from many people planning together, working together, and taking shared responsibility for the outcomes.

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## ► From the Director's Desk

### The Real Bottom Line

**T**he Bottom Line" brings images of dollar signs to most people. To those of us in school nutrition programs, another way to view "the bottom line" is in terms of participation—that percentage of all students enrolled in school who eat school breakfasts and lunches.

Back in the early 1990s, Dr. Jocelyn Elders, then U.S. Surgeon General, spoke at the American School Food Service Association's Industry Seminar. Her message is as timely today as it was then. "The National School Lunch Program was started in 1946 to 'protect the health and well-being of the nation's children.' It didn't say 'poor children' or 'well-to-do' children. It said 'children', and that means **all children**," she emphasized.

Dr. Elders cited statistics that show an average of only 56% of students throughout the country are eating school lunch, and she challenged us to "do better."

SO, how ARE we doing?

According to the *School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study-II (SNDA Study-II)*, published by USDA in April of 2001, about 60% of all students in public NSLP (National School Lunch Program) schools participated in the program in 1998-99. In Vermont, our overall average daily participation rate was only 46% for the same school year. This is 14 percentage points **below** the national average! (Our average daily participation for NSLP did increase to 48% of enrollment for the school year 2000-2001.) North Dakota and Iowa, states with demographics similar to Vermont's, had average daily participation rates of 63.7% and 70.8% respectively for the same year.

The *SNDA Study-II* reported that participation was highest in elementary schools (67% of total enrollment on average) and lowest in high schools (39% of total enrollment on average). Although we do not have participation rates broken out by elementary schools and high schools in Vermont, schools can easily calculate their own participation rates to see how they compare to the national average.

1. Determine a time period (in days). Use number of serving days in a school year for comparison to state and national averages; use serving days in individual months to compare months and spot trends at the local level.
2. Determine total lunches served during the time frame selected in step 1. Divide the number of lunches by the number of days. (This figure gives you the average number of lunches served each day.)
3. Divide the result of step 2 by the total school enrollment, then multiply by 100 to convert the decimal places to a percent.

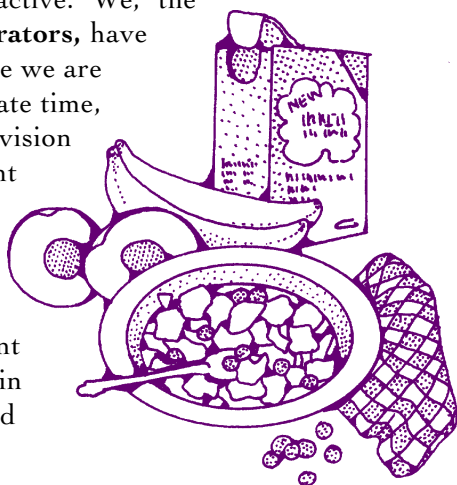
#### Example:

$$\frac{75,500}{\text{Total student lunches served in selected time period}} + \frac{179}{\text{Days of operation in selected time period}} + \frac{770}{\text{Total school enrollment}} = .5477762 \times 100 = \frac{55.8\%}{\text{Average Daily Participation (ADP)}}$$

According to *The SNDA Study-II*, in school year 1998-99, more than three-quarters of all public NSLP schools nationwide offered the SBP (School Breakfast Program). National average daily participation was 22 %. (Participation in elementary schools averaged 26%, in high schools it was 11% of total enrollment). In Vermont, the percentage of NSLP schools also participating in SBP was 84%, which is nearly 8 percentage points higher than the national average. However, average daily participation in the breakfast program in Vermont is 17%; that is 5 percentage points **below** the national average.

So how do we get more kids to participate in the breakfast and lunch programs. How do we make sure that the meals they are offered and eat are nutritious? Let's turn again to Dr. Elders' advice. She did not say we should continue business as usual. She said we must go beyond changing menus. In addition to offering a variety of nutritious foods, she called for strong nutrition education and for school environments that allow time enough to eat and encourage students to eat nutritious meals. Although she would most likely add physical activity as another dimension if she were speaking on this topic today, her challenge would remain the same—"we" are not doing our jobs until we are doing all these things. **It was clear that the "we" she referred to included more than just food service staff!**

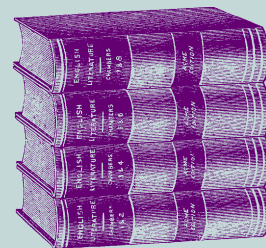
"We," the **food service staff**, have miles to go before we are providing the choices of delicious, nutritious, affordable foods students need in order to learn to eat wisely. "We," the **teachers**, have miles to go before we are using every opportunity to teach students about good food, sound nutrition, and the pleasures and benefits of eating well and being physically active. "We," the **school administrators**, have miles to go before we are providing adequate time, space, and supervision to ensure pleasant eating experiences, and miles to go before we are sending consistent health messages in the classroom and



## Schools Have an Important Role

**A**s a result of its research and analysis, the study group firmly believes that schools have an important role to play in addressing the needs of students by helping them succeed academically and by supporting the growth that will enable them to lead successful, productive adult lives. The question is not *whether* schools should address non-academic barriers to learning but *what* they can do both alone and with others to support learning.

– National  
Association of  
State Boards  
of Education



corridors. "We," the **adults** in students' lives must be role models for healthy behavior. "We," the **state and federal legislators and policy makers**, have miles to go before we are providing adequate funding and realistic administrative requirements that will enable local staffs to meet the needs of children. And finally, "we," the **parents**, have miles to go before we are insisting that the priority of a healthy school nutrition environment is increased at all levels and are modeling and supporting good nutrition and physical activity habits.

"We" won't travel those miles in a week, or a month or a year. But "we" **can** reach the destination if all of us take the first step together. That step is agreeing that because healthy children learn better, because educated children become healthier adults, and because nutritious school meals that are consumed by students and regular opportunities for physical activity help build healthy children, we must escalate our efforts to improve our "bottom line."

– Jo Busba, State Director

## ► *Teaming up for Action*

**P**romoting healthy behaviors among students is an important part of the fundamental mission of schools: to help young people acquire the knowledge and skills to become healthy and productive adults. By promoting and supporting healthy behaviors, schools can increase students' capacity to learn, reduce absences, and improve physical fitness and mental alertness.

### Even The Lone Ranger Had Tonto!

When it comes to making a significant difference in a complex environment, teamwork beats working alone, hands down! And the “big nutrition picture” for children is certainly a complex environment. Changes and improvements are more likely to occur when interested, informed persons join forces than if efforts are fragmented as individuals try to find the time, the energy, and other resources to tackle the job. Partnerships multiply the impact of individuals.

There is no magic formula for the perfect team. You can start with one that already exists like a school health council or the PTO and recruit appropriate additional persons to participate in this initiative. Or you can create a new team whose sole focus is the nutrition environment. The important thing is to include people who have a stake in the health of students: students, parents, teachers, support staff, food service staff, administrators, business managers, guidance counselors, health care professionals, chefs, and even business men or women. Actually, anyone who is interested in health, children, or nutrition and food is a potential partner. All partners bring their own perspectives, their own set of resources, their own potential for motivating others, and unique skills and abilities to effect positive change.

“How do I start?” you ask. A first step is to invite likely members to an exploratory meeting. There are reproducible masters in the “Support Materials” booklet in the *Changing the Scene* kit that can be used to generate interest. These are also included on the CD-ROM in that same kit and can be downloaded and modified to include local information. At the first meeting, the presentation

### Possible Topics for Assessment

- The school's commitment to nutrition and physical activity
- Quality school meals
- Other healthy food options
- Pleasant eating experiences
- Nutrition education
- Marketing of school meals
- Participation in school meals program(s)
- Community options for physical activity
- Parent commitment to nutrition and physical activity

script and/or video from the *Changing the Scene* kit can be used to set the stage for the work the team will embark on.

### The Assessment Phase

To work together as an effective team there must be a clear picture of the team's goals. However, before goals can be developed, it is important to know the strong points of the current school nutrition environment and the areas that need improvement.

Several evaluation tools are available for conducting an assessment of the school nutrition environment. One is the “School Health Index for Physical Activity and Healthy Eating” that was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health. The other is the “Improvement Checklist” included in the kit *Changing the Scene*. The team may want to choose one of these evaluation tools and use it as is. However, it may be that the assessment tool needs to be personalized to each



individual school. This can be a local decision. Keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to get the desired information.

Student surveys are also important to consider in evaluating the current situation. The National Food Service Management Institute has developed surveys for elementary, middle school, and high school levels and will compile and interpret the results for a nominal fee. Parent surveys might also be conducted.

For more information on each of these resources, refer to page 6.

While developing a team and working as a team is crucial for effective change, it is not a simple process. Being a team member requires openness to new ideas, willingness to hear and respect each person's suggestions, and acceptance of responsibility for participating and taking on some of the work. Team members can educate themselves and each other about the current situation, about model programs and practices, about possible new approaches, and regulations or restraints that affect what can and cannot be done. Armed with this knowledge the team can formulate strategies for addressing the key concerns and can implement creative approaches that will make a real difference in children's behaviors related to eating and physical activity.



## The Action Plan

**1. Analyze and interpret data.** The information gathered from the assessments provide the foundation for plans to improve the nutrition environment. It is important to share the assessment results with all team members and discuss what the results mean. This is a critical step because the findings provide the basis for goals and activities, as well as the standards against which progress will be measured.



## Setting Priorities

Some questions the team might ask when determining priorities include:

- What is the most important task to be accomplished right away?
- What tasks can wait to be worked on?
- Where can we make the biggest difference with the fewest resources in the shortest amount of time?
- What improvement(s) can we get the most immediate support for?



**2. Determine priorities and develop goals and activities accordingly.** In an ideal world, the team would have the resources needed to make all the desired changes. However, in the real world, resources are limited. To help assure progress and success, decide what is most important and set goals and develop activities to start working to make those changes. Working on too many priorities at one time can be overwhelming and set the team up for failure.

**3. Write the plan.** Develop a timeline and plans that focus efforts and resources on realistic activities that will lead to changes that will benefit everyone. When building your plan, look at the total pool of resources—time, money, commitment, skills, ability, knowledge, creativity, and so on—available for your use. Maximize the resources you can bring to bear to achieve the goals of your action plan.

Additional tasks include establishing time frames and determining who will be responsible for doing what. Each team member may have his or her own priority or area of expertise. This helps in dividing up the work that is to be done. Setting times for reviewing successes and resolving problems are essential to the plan. Also, to keep the team on track, there needs to be a method for evaluating progress and making adjustments in the plan due to changes in priorities or resources.



## Helpful Resources for Assessment of the Nutrition Environment

***Changing the Scene*** is a kit that was developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service in collaboration with a number of professional organizations and government entities. Kit components include:

- ~ “Guide to Local Action”
- ~ Support materials (including improvement checklist, handouts, sample letters, meeting notice, press release, and articles)
- ~ Resources from collaborating organizations (including the chapter “Policies to Encourage Healthy Eating,” from *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide*)
- ~ Power Point presentation with script and transparencies
- ~ Video
- ~ Brochures
- ~ CD-ROM with many of the kit materials for printing or downloading for the purpose of modifying for local use

To obtain a copy of the ***Changing the Scene*** kit (while supplies last), visit the Team Nutrition Home Page: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn> to download or e-mail an order form. If more than one person from a school requests a kit, your name and phone number may be shared with other interested people from that school.

***Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn, A School Health Policy Guide, Part I***, is a publication that was developed under a cooperative agreement with the Division of Adolescent and School Health of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Association of State Boards of Education. It was designed to reflect the concerns and priorities of education policymakers and administrators as well as others who want to contribute to the process of developing school health policies. Relevant chapters include:

- ~ The Art of Policymaking
- ~ General School Health Policies
- ~ Policies to Encourage Physical Activity
- ~ Policies to Encourage Healthy Eating

To obtain a copy of ***Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn, A School Health Policy Guide, Part I***, visit <http://www.NASBE.org/HealthySchools/nasbepubs.mgi>.

The ***School Health Index for Physical Activity and Healthy Eating: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide*** is a self assessment and planning tool that can help to evaluate a school's health promotion policies and programs and take steps to improving them. There is an elementary school version as well as a middle/high school version.

To obtain a copy of the ***School Health Index***, download from <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash> or request by phone at 1-770-488-3168.

The ***High School Foodservice Survey, Middle/Junior High School Foodservice Survey, and Elementary School Foodservice Survey*** were developed and tested by the National Food Service Management Institute and are sold in units of 100. Also available is a ***Program Director/Supervisor's Survey Guide*** for each survey. These guides include the survey process, sample letters, manager's guide for conducting surveys, formulas, and sample analysis to use in continuous improvement. An instructional video is also included.

NFSMI's Resource Guide and order form is available on line at [www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org) Or call NFSMI at 1-800-321-3054.

**4. Implement the plan.** It should go without saying that nothing gets accomplished if the plan is not put into action. But many of the best-laid plans falter because less time and effort is put into acting on the plans than was spent on developing the plans!

Be prepared for the unexpected. And expect to make minor or major revisions to your overall plan as implementation takes place. Things can go wrong even with well-developed plans, so it is important to monitor progress and make adjustments as needed. Some problems can be anticipated and contingencies developed within the overall plan. To help develop contingency plans,

engage in some “what if” thinking at the start of the planning process.



## References

- Changing the Scene Kit, Improving the School Nutrition Environment*, Team Nutrition, Food and Nutrition Service, US Department of Agriculture.
- Equity & Excellence: An Action Planning Guide*, Vermont Department of Education, School Improvement Team.
- Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn, A School Health Policy Guide, Part I*, National Association of State Boards of Education.
- Reverse the Trends: Create a Healthy School Nutrition Environment for Students*, A Publication of the Child Nutrition Unit, Arkansas Department of Education.
- School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide*, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## Communication

Open communication is critical to effective teamwork. Sharing information with one another on a regular, ongoing basis makes it easier to adjust or revise the overall plan or specific parts of the plan. People need to know of changes in expectations and ways the plan may have been updated. Nothing creates negativity faster than a lack of communication. To keep lines of communication open, schedule regular “working sessions” to chart progress and to plan activities. Keep meeting minutes and distribute to all team members.

Let others in the school and in the community know about the team’s activities. Invite them to participate as often as possible. This can help you win support for your goals, gain recognition for your school, and encourage others to join the team or contribute expertise or even tangible resources to the effort. Newsletters, school report nights/days, town reports, the school web site, and media outlets are some different ways to keep the community informed.

Change is often difficult for individuals and organizations because change implies that something is broken and no one wants to be considered part of a problem. It is important to help people see change as a commitment to success. Keep the lines of communication open and the focus of discussions on the goal. Remember, it is the students’ health that is at stake!

## ► Program Improvement Ideas

### Investing in the Future

**W**hen questioned about the challenges faced by school food service programs, a common response is that school food service is a rapidly changing field. Children like different foods than they did years ago. Parents have different expectations and some are not shy about offering comments. Administrators expect that programs be self-supporting. Not to mention all the directives from USDA passed along by the state consultants! Do you have a plan for keeping up with changing regulations and policies? Becoming familiar with best practices? Learning new skills?

When program practices and program employees' skills are not improving, there is always the risk that the program will decline to the point where the administration will make decisions that directly impact the food service staff. Rather than operate in a vacuum or avoid responsibility for the financial health of the program, food service managers and staff need to keep in mind the famous slogan of the 1960s, "If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem."

### Professional Development

There are a number of steps food service managers and staff can take to become part of the solution:

- 1. Recognize that professional development is critical to the continued health and success of school food service programs.** No one is immune from the need to upgrade their knowledge, improve their skills, or learn new techniques and ideas. Teachers and administrators have professional development plans to assure that they continue to improve in their field. For the same reason, the school food service staff needs to have a plan for their professional development.
- 2. Address the issue of professional development.** If there is no plan for professional development, one should be started. Each food service staff member should be included. Seek support and input from the school administration. They may have expectations or suggestions that can be included in the plan.

You might request support in the form of reimbursement for travel expenses, pay for substitutes so employees can attend workshops, and/or pay for time employees spend in professional development activities. Perhaps the administration could pay for some of these expenses out of a school-wide professional development fund and food service could foot the cost of other expenses. Although it is not "fair," employees in many fields believe so strongly in professional development that they pay all or some of their own expenses to participate in classes and workshops.

**3. Seek out appropriate professional development activities.** Child Nutrition Programs offers a number of training sessions, workshops, and conferences appropriate for those working in the different Programs—school lunch and breakfast, after school snack program, child and adult care program, and the summer food program. These are announced in the Calendar of Events in each newsletter as well as in separate notices or brochures for each individual event.

College level courses and adult education and/or vocational school classes may also provide information and training that will improve knowledge and skills. Membership in the national organization, the American School Food Service





Association, provides the opportunity to attend a national conference plus 10 issues of the magazine, *School Foodservice & Nutrition*. This publication contains a wealth of information and ideas. ASFSA has a certification program. The state affiliate, Vermont School Food Association also provides opportunities for professional development.

**4. Develop your own training sessions when appropriate.** Individual schools can hold food service staff meetings and trainings. Or schools within a supervisory union might work together to coordinate training sessions. Child Nutrition Programs has many training resources we are happy to loan to schools wishing to conduct training sessions. Many of these resources are self-guided video and workbook sessions that managers can conduct with their staff.

## What's Your Attitude?

Among food service managers and staff in Vermont, we have those who embrace opportunities for learning with open arms. They are visible in their schools. They network and attend classes and read professional publications. Even if a course isn't quite what they expected, they think about how they might use the information presented in their particular situation and learn from it anyway. They are enthusiastic about new ideas and excited about trying them out.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who don't read newsletters or work-related publications, toss training announcements into the recycle bin, and resist input from any source. They put a lot of effort into maintaining the status quo—not wanting anyone or anything to impact what they have been doing for months (or years).

Of course, there are many reasons why not everyone can participate in all the professional development activities that are available, or institute sweeping changes in their programs—it's called real life. But that is not permission to wear blinders and do nothing to contribute to personal or program growth.

Real life involves setting priorities, which includes setting goals and making decisions that will help to achieve those goals. Even if a person does not plan to stay in the same position all his or her working life, a letter of recommendation that points

## Summer Institute

**One of the best opportunities for professional development for both food service managers and staff is Summer Institute. Because of the week-long time frame we can offer multi-day courses that provide in-depth coverage of topics. So set aside the week of August 19-23 for professional development!**

**Some of the courses that are planned include:**

- Introduction to School Food Service
- Food Safety and Sanitation
- Healthy Edge
- Excel for School Food Service
- Browsing the World Wide Web
- Putting Your Best Food Forward

**This year we are trying something new by offering courses in two locations during "Summer Institute Week." One location is in the Burlington area and the other will be a more southern location. By next newsletter, specific sites for Summer Institute as well as the specific location for each course should be firmed up. Stay tuned for more information!**



out a desire for personal and professional growth and willingness to learn is more likely to interest a prospective employer than one that says only "comes to work every day." Get in the habit of working with and learning from others, seeking out opportunities for personal and professional growth, maintaining a positive outlook, and seeking creative solutions to problems and issues. Both you and your Program will reap the benefits.

## ► Program Information

### Food That's In When School Is Out

**C**ongress created the Summer Food Service Program for Children (SFSP) in 1968 out of concern for proper nutrition for children during times when school is not in session. This program is intended to assure that children who rely on free and reduced price school meals during the school year continue to have access to nutritious meals during the summer.

In the past 10 years, the Summer Food Service Program has grown dramatically in Vermont, from 11 sponsors operating 16 sites in 1992, to 49 sponsors operating 146 sites in 2001. The average number of children served each day has increased from 820 to 4173. In 1992, we reached about 5% of the needy children in the state; last year it was 17%. While this indicates significant program growth, that still leaves 83% of the children in Vermont who are eligible for free or reduced price meals during the school year without benefit of free meals during the summer.

If you have a relatively high rate of free and reduced price eligible children in your school, why not explore the possibility of offering a summer meals program. Combined with school- or community-based activities, a meal program helps increase participation.

A notice was recently sent to all schools explaining the availability of a seamless summer waiver. In a nutshell, the waiver allows a school to operate the SFSP nearly the same way as the school year program. (Operating a "traditional" Summer Food Service Program involves different regulations and recordkeeping requirements which many schools find more labor intense than the school year program.) The waiver is available to new school sponsors as well as ones who have operated under the Summer Food Service Program regulations.

Please contact Helen Ballard at 828-5155 or [hballard@doe.state.vt.us](mailto:hballard@doe.state.vt.us) if you are interested in learning more about the Summer Food Service Program and/or the Seamless Summer Waiver. But hurry! The deadline for application to participate is May 15!

### Get Wired!

As more schools get hooked up to the Internet and food service managers and staff become more comfortable with computers, new sources of information become available. But how do you know where to start? Here is a basic web site and a couple of "listservs" to get you started. Once you get to the web sites, there are also links to other web sites—there's a whole new world out there!

<http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/> is the web address for the Healthy School Meals Resource System, which is USDA's main source of information about the various Child Nutrition Programs. Some categories and links include:

- What's New, Training Materials
- Resources, Recipes and Menus
- Food Safety
- Chef's Connection
- Industry Links, Regulations
- On-line Discussion Groups
- Resources from States
- Food and Nutrition Information Center
- Food and Nutrition Service
- Child Care Nutrition Resource System
- Team Nutrition

Much information can be downloaded and printed.

On the home page for the Healthy School Meals Resource System, there is a category in the left column labeled "Let's Talk." If you click on this option, it will open up a page describing several "listservs" (e-mail discussion groups) that you can sign up for. **Mealtalk**, **Successstalk**, and **Foodsafe** are the listservs that are open to professionals who operate the Child Nutrition Programs.



## ► Bulletin Board

### Food For Thought...

"If you think American business struggles to control health care costs now, just wait a few years, when today's cholesterol-clogged, overweight adolescents join the work force."

– Art Popham, Syndicated Columnist

### Want to Work at a Summer Camp?

We occasionally receive calls from residential camps inquiring about school food service people who might be interested in cooking and/or serving as food service director at a summer camp. If the idea intrigues anyone out there, get in touch with Helen Ballard.



### [www.state.vt.us/educ/nutrition](http://www.state.vt.us/educ/nutrition)

At our Nutrition Fairs last November, we introduced our new web site. Please stop by and visit!

### We Need YOUR Help!

Do you have items appropriate for the bulletin board? A newspaper clipping about your program? A promotional idea? Food service equipment for sale? Food service equipment you are looking for? An award or recognition given to a food service employee? A favorite menu?

Please don't be shy! Your colleagues out there are hungry for information about other food service personnel and programs. Contact Helen Ballard (see page 2 for phone, fax, e-mail, snail mail) and she will take it from there.

### Child Nutrition Employee Appreciation Week

May 6-10, 2002

### Help Wanted

Person to work full-time for 8-10 weeks during the summer. Will conduct program reviews for the Summer Food Service Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Requires travel throughout the state. Must have reliable transportation. Hourly rate plus mileage reimbursement. For more information contact Jo Busha at 828-5154.

## ► *Calendar of Events*

### **May 2, 2002**

#### **CACFP & SFSP Annual Conference: Moving in the Right Direction**

9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Killington Grand Hotel and Conference Center, Killington

*Sponsored by VT Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs*

### **August 19-23, 2002**

#### **Summer Institute**

Locations to be announced

*Sponsored by VT Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs*

### **October 24-25, 2002**

#### **School Food Service Annual Fall Conference**

Killington Grand Hotel and Conference Center Killington

*Sponsored by VT Department of Education and Vermont*

*School Food Service Association*

*Please share this newsletter  
with others: School Nurse, Guidance,  
EST Coordinator*

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